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# Company ordered to pay benefits

Missoulian State Bureau

HELENA - W.R. Grace and Co. was ordered Thursday to pay \$2.75 million for community health benefits as part of a settlement with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency for denying access for cleanup operations in Libby.

Under the consent decree, issued in U.S. District Court in Missoula, Grace is also required to pay \$71,000 in penalties to the federal government.

A nonprofit organization has been set up in Libby to administer the settlement funds.

The organization is expected to use the money for future screening for asbestos-related diseases, to provide medical care not included in the Grace medical plan, and to cover people who have asbestos-related diseases but were denied coverage under a currently existing Grace plan.

From 1963 to 1990, Grace owned and operated a vermiculite mine in Libby that has since been blamed for hundreds of illnesses and at least 200 deaths caused by

■ EPA says insulation removal in Libby likely won't expand nationwide

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## Benefits

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exposure to asbestos that contaminated the vermiculite ore.

Also on Thursday, Grace made a fourth payment of \$250,000 to St. John's Lutheran Hospital in Libby to help ensure the town is able to provide medical care for people with asbestos-related illnesses.

The company said in a press release Thursday that there are no strings attached to the donation, and that past contributions have helped the local Center for Asbestos-Related Diseases clinic.

"We made a commitment to the people of this community, and it's one that we are glad to keep," said Alan Stringer, Grace's Libby representative.

Since 2000, Grace has

operated a medical program for people who have been diagnosed with asbestos-related diseases connected to the company's Libby mine.

Officials at the CARD clinic reported earlier this week that Grace denied nearly two-thirds of the applicants to the medical program in January and February - after accepting all but one or two people in 2000 and 2001. Stringer said the applicants simply did not meet qualifications.

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